

# ***Soulthief: A First Draft***

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

How does one walk forward into the unknown while resisting the temptation to look back? More dangerously, how do we keep from standing still? Whether orphaned too young in an uncaring world, or desperately attempting to power through a career-ending injury, the desire to reach out to the past and wrench it forward to the present can be overwhelming. In the pilot of *Soulthief*, we kickstart the journey of a terminally-ill girl and a crippled knight in their struggles to regain what they lost in the aftermath of the local evil necromancer's death. In order to tell their story, I confront my own tendencies towards stagnation in the name of perfectionism as I undertake the task of writing my first ever hour-long teleplay.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Professor Kathryn Gardiner for advising me during this project. Her encouragement and suggestions helped me to push forward and complete this project, and to see beyond the first draft.

I would also like to thank Vi, Sirca, Lauren, and Harumi for reading my drafts and telling me about their favorite spooky parts.

### Process Analysis Statement

It starts with the villain.

Specifically, it starts with Arthas Menethil of *Warcraft* fame, and my grim realization that the only atrocity greater than a superficially charming man who eats souls for a living is to write that man out of the narrative after he dies. Surely, I thought, there was no greater horror, no worse crime man could visit upon man, than to desecrate another's very death. What sort of evil could such a man incarnate? How much greater an abomination could he become after his own demise? In that garden of understanding germinated a particularly intrepid idea that someone should fix that, and that that someone should be me. Thus: the Soulthief. From there, *Soulthief*.

That this project would be the pilot for a television series was never in doubt. Partially, this was due to the novelty of the challenge. All previous scripts I had written were one-off stories which began and resolved over the course of a single document. An episode, however, required that I play a certain balancing act wherein the story told must not only satisfactorily begin and end over the course of a single script, but *also* successfully set up enough dominos and leave enough hanging threads that an audience (hopefully somewhere in the multimillions) will cheerfully tuck in for the second episode, and then the third, and sit riveted still in three seasons' time. The effort seems not unlike that of an author writing a chapter, developing characters inches over centuries and unfurling the mysteries of the plot one slow roll at a time.

Once I had the basic idea for a villain, the rest of the conceptual work came along easily. I immediately latched onto the idea of our viewpoint character being the Soulthief's child, and just as quickly decided that they ought to be secretly on his side. Practically, it helped to sufficiently answer the audience's inevitable question of "Why doesn't the villain just kill the

hero?” If the villain repeatedly fails, they lose their sense of threat. If they succeed, we potentially end up with a very short series. Not only does introducing this parent-child relationship suspend the audience’s disbelief a little while longer, it also aided me in narrowing down what I wanted *Soulthief* to really be about: the difficulty of moving on.

The whole project is really just an exercise in moving on. In my writings, I have an atrocious habit of treating the first drafts of my work as though they ought to be the third drafts. I nitpick and stall, fussing over a specific turn of phrase for weeks on end because it is not *precisely* perfect by my standards. The project stagnates, after a year, I may have only written five pages for that piece. At nearly sixty pages in length and a hard deadline of only a few months, I could not afford to fall into this quagmire of toxic perfectionism. To that end, Professor Gardiner and I decided early on in the project that all drafts I gave to her for her inspection and annotation would remain in her possession until the completion of the first draft. Our hope was that, by doing so, I would avoid spending time trying to fix those mistakes instead of focusing on my actual task at hand: actually *finishing* the first draft.

Most of my preliminary work consisted of me trying to set up a skeleton of a plot upon which I could build. Since the actual work of writing itself would undoubtedly engender a number of changes to my original idea, however, I strove to develop the story almost as superficially as possible. Metaphoric meaning and thematic weight could be ascribed later; *right now* all that mattered was that the very idea of a horrific plague doctor-esque monster skulking about murdering people fascinated me, and thus a place was made in the world of *Soulthief* for such an abomination. An older woman filling the archetype of the grand old knight appealed to me, and thus Luka Forring came into existence. Since I had deeply enjoyed the Victorian-esque

atmospheres of the show *Penny Dreadful* and the games *Bloodborne*, *Dishonored*, and *Vampyr*, I

The beat sheet, wherein I broke down the narrative acts of the pilot and outlined their general plot points, is intentionally as casual and cavalier as I could make it. What was fun was what mattered. As a result, I completed the conceptual work and was ready to actually start writing very swiftly.

Which was for the best, because actually *writing* was akin to pulling teeth in the beginning. Scriptwriting is a medium which requires rigid adherence to the technical requirements of only depicting what could be physically seen or heard by a viewing audience, while also ensuring that the script itself is an entertaining read. The balancing act of describing precisely what is going on while also leaving room open for the directors and actors to work in their own interpretations is akin to walking a tightrope, and I struggled often with it in the pilot. If I feared I had overwritten a previous scene, I might only sparsely describe the next - and vice versa. Developing a sense of space in each scene proved most challenging for this reason. Since I have no idea what sort of sets might be available to film the pilot in, I shied away from describing the locations particularly much. The cost, unfortunately, is that the characters do not interact with the spaces around them as much as they could, and thus spend an inordinate amount of time merely standing around talking to one another. Even as I became aware of this flaw in the writing, I could not go back and rectify it - or, perhaps more appropriately, I could not *allow* myself to go back and rectify it. The point of a first draft, Professor Gardiner informed me, is to simply exist, no matter how glaring you think its flaws may be. Without its existence, nothing else could be done.

Now, however. We've the second draft to look forward to.

### Documentation of Sources

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## Appendices

### Appendix A - ORIGINAL TREATMENT

#### ● Teaser - THE DRAGONSLAYER

- Luka Forring vs. Alistair Soulthief
  - Ragtag people vs. big giant clockwork soldiers, GO
  - FIGHT
  - Luka Forring (Luke Skywalker Fordring, heck yeah originality) vs. Alistair “We’re Not Calling It Necromancy Yet” Necromancer-Man
    - He stabs her in the leg, she bashes in his head
    - “Hope this haunts you, asshole,” says Lord Asshole Himself
    - “Fuck you,” says Ye Olde Paladin
- Better teaser to consider: Vathys bursting into an apartment, ripping off a piece of pipe, and etching a bunch of runes into the floor of the apartment with it
  - Talking to herself (holding conversation with an invisible Alistair)
  - Ready to FIGHT

#### ● Act One - THE PATIENT

- Off the boat, here we go, welcome to BETHANY
  - Lazarus, eat your undead heart out
  - Pseudo-Victorian era London aesthetic with fewer guns that we may or *may not* be stealing from *Dishonored*, *Thief*, and *Penny Dreadful*
- Down the winding cobblestone streets we walk, Vathys... not really having any clue where she’s going, until at last she’s just standing outside of a building and

staring hard between it and a scrap of paper clutched in her hand, because *is* this her hotel?

- “You need help?”

- Felix Solas!!

- Friendly sort, sees how Vathys is lost

- Walks with her to her to where her actual hotel is, and they talk along the way

- *See more of the city this way*

- Vathys here because of a blood disease, she’s hoping the good doctor will be able to help her not die

- They get to the hotel, Felix bids her adieu, and we’ll see more of him much later

- At the hotel

- Nighttime, Vath in her room, looking out at the streets below while also *coughing up blood*

- Additionally, ostensibly, she’s talking to herself

- **Act Two - THE DOCTOR**

- Into the doctor’s office we walk, all is well, health shall be cared for today

- Except

- Ex-bloody-cept

- Along with Doctor Plass is a giant bloody Crow Man

- Plague doctor-looking dude, but more.... crow-y



- ( “I called, I promised I called, but he didn’t answer,” Plass will be stuttering before suddenly MURDER )
- Vathys walks in and sees just in time as a Crow Man kills Plass
- Crow Man sees her - she sees him - and there is something, a moment, might we call it *recognition*...?
  - Before the Crow Man VAULTS through a window, out into the street below
- CHASE SCENE
  - Vathys FOLLOWS, because this feathery bastard just murdered the doctor she needed to see and NOW WHAT IS SHE SUPPOSED TO DO? DIE??
  - Through the alley they run, Crow Man has the lead until **BAM**
    - **MACE TO THE FACE**
      - **GUESS WHO’S BACK**
- GENERAL LUKA FORRING
  - Strides into the scene, walking cane in one hand, mace in the other
  - Crow Man explodes into feathers (and possibly crows)
    - He was not, we find out, the actual Crow Man. The true Crow Man is distinguishable by the coffin he wears strapped to his back, in which the remains of Alistair the Soulthief are stored. No one knows what the false Crow Men are, whether they are constructs or true men

- We find this out because Vathys has a moment trying to deal with the fact that she just watched a man get hit with a hammer and respond by *exploding into a bunch of birds*
- Luka's exposition-dumping while they make their way to the doctor's office
- Send a messenger to get the police, because. you know. dead man.

- **Act Three - THE RESURRECTIONISTS**

- Doctor's office, police are swarming
  - Luka speaking with Head Detective Morrick, who is *not happy*
    - This stuff was supposed to end with Alistair Soulthief's death, *and yet*
      - Luka thinks they're just a bunch of desperate renegades, but Morrick is less certain
      - They consider Vathys (from a distance, obviously) - is she suspicious?
        - Probably not, because this kid is coughing up blood. She's definitely sick.
  - The police find a dollar store Necronomicon among the doctor's personal effects and are just *what the fuck-ing* a lot
  - "Yo, Vath," Morrick and Luka say, "what happened here?"

- Vath mentions what she'd heard before the Crow Man killed Plass, about how "he won't answer" and all that rot
  - And Luka and Morrick realize - the doctor must also have been a spirit medium
    - And the Resurrectionists are trying to contact Alistair
  - Vathys: "The Res-what"
  - Luka: "Fools following a dead monster, and now we have to worry about *what are they going to do now?*"
- Luka tries to shake off Vathys at this point, but Vath is invested. Dead doctor means no one to help her with her disease, meaning she's just gonna die.
  - Luka brings her on.
    - This is a bad idea.
- The Underbelly
  - At the inland edges of town, specifically the quarter closest to the Lazarium in the distance; Soulthief, it's said, did a lot of business with the people here
  - At the 'gates' so to say, Luka offers Vathys another out
    - Vathys walks forward

- Seedy little place where among other black market goings-on, doctors and actual resurrection men do their business of exchanging money for dissection corpses
  - ( Resurrectionists actually got the name *from* resurrection men, due to public preconceptions and also I like the word resurrection )
- It is here that Luka confronts a surgeon in the middle of a deal
  - What do you know about Plass, why would Resurrectionists target him, etc etc etc
- The surgeon is not *especially* happy, but you kind of just have to deal with it when General Luka Forring, Slayer of Great Bad Evil Warlocks comes over and asks you what the FUCK is going on
  - Except hey!! No you don't because guess what
  - General Luka Forring, Slayer of Great Bad Evil Warlocks is **really easy to identify in a crowd** and, yanno, *the surgeon* may not be a Resurrectionist, but those people quietly forming a circle around Luka and Vathys most likely are
  - Fight scene
    - Luka starts off well but a) her leg is still *severely* injured, and they're faster, younger, more numerous
    - Things start looking bad until **BAM**

- **MAGIC**

- **WHAT THE HELL, HOW DID THEY**

- DIE**

- Vathys, effusing luminescent smoke, but Luka isn't looking at her, she's looking *beyond* her, past her, and Vathys turns - looks behind her -

- And it's Alistair

- **Act Four - THE SOULTHIEF**

- Alistair, you absolute poltergeist.

- Luka takes his presence as well as one can, which is to say *not at bloody all*

- Pretty much drags Vathys into a more deserted alley, and I just realized how often Luka is interrogating in this script, might need to work on that

- Vathys admits she was possessed by Alistair very soon after Luka killed him

- Also notes that most people can't see him when he manifests (which is somewhat rare, as doing so weakens Vathys in the long run)

- Luka, they figure, can see him since she killed him and Alistair's death curse *was* that "this will haunt you"

- Luka: "Why and how did he haunt you"

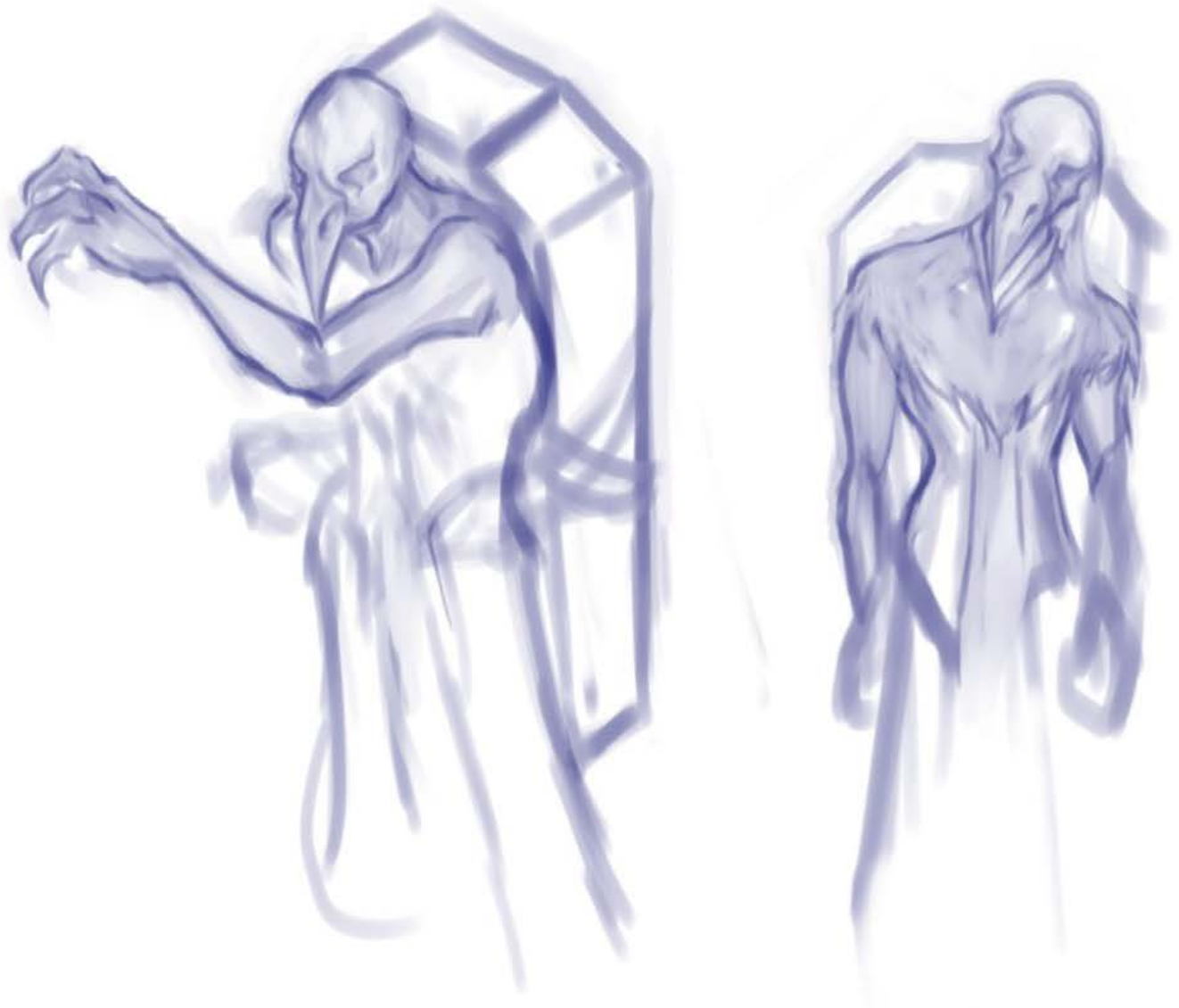
- "... He's my father and I lived in the Lazarium"
- It was, she claims, an accident. She'd picked up the blade of his broken spear, and the next thing she knows she's got her dad living in some corner of her brain
  - (One might ask - if that's the case, then why did she very explicitly arrive at Bethany on a boat, when the Lazarium is *right over there* - and that is an answer for Later)
  - Alistair murmurs that his intent was to soul-jar himself into the spear, but apparently the process didn't work out so well considering Luka broke the spear
  - Being haunted is killing Vathys, and they would both prefer she not die
- She came to the doctor because of his abilities as a spirit medium, hoping he would be enough to help her. She wasn't lying about the dying, just the cause
  - So not only has she lied to Luka, but she withheld *critical* information in regards to the investigation for Plass' murder
    - Luka considers killing her
    - Alistair 10000% shamelessly guilt trips her into *not*
      - "Murdering a child for the sins of the father is *very unheroic of you, General Forring*"

- Luka stops herself, and Vathys makes an observation: eventually, the Resurrectionists are going to realize that there's a reason they cannot contact Alistair, at which point they will either escalate
  - And Luka, we've learned, cannot travel through these dark and dreary places; she is not familiar nor accepted by their denizens
    - But, Vathys offers, *she* could. And in the process, she might either avenge her soon-to-be death, or find a way to exorcise her father and save her own life
  - Luka... does not answer for now. Merely walks off, away from Vathys and Alistair
- **Act Five - THE HOME**
  - Dinnertime
    - Luka and Morrick (damn, he deserves a name at this point, doesn't he) are eating, discussing the problem with the Resurrectionists
      - They also talk about Vathys
        - Luka doesn't out the whole "possessed by her evil dead dad" thing, but *does* note that she distrusts Vath's 'motivations'
      - Morrick suggests to keep her close: if she's legit, then Luka has a valuable ally in the making. If she's a threat, then Luka will be nearby to dispose of her
  - Vathys' Hotel

- Vathys is coughing blood again; finally, we see Alistair as he holds a conversation with his daughter, consoling her that she will not die
- Messenger comes to the door: he's got a package he was told to deliver straight to her
  - In it: a grimoire
  - In the grimoire: a crow's feather



**Appendix B - Concept art of the Crowfolk, drawn by Harumi Martinez (April 2019).**





### Appendix C - Preparations for the second draft.

- Most important note: **Make Alistair's presence more obvious and known**
- Rewrite teaser to foreshadow:
  - Alistair's spear breaking breaking his attempt at becoming a lich
  - Show the spearhead there - and then not there - more obviously.
  - Include, somehow, notes for the camera positions of us watching the way Vathys watches
- First act:
  - DO NOT start with Vathys coming in on a boat
    - Seems cheesy, also we did not learn anything this way that we could not learn in a more streamlined, natural fashion otherwise
  - Have Vathys already in the city, interacting with people
    - Makes her seem less suspicious from the get-go
    - START with a puppet show, since I'm so determined to use that as a symbol?
  - See how Luka interacts with the people of the city more clearly
    - See *also* the differences between those who like her, and those who don't
    - Introduce the dissection vs. no dissection plot quicker
    - **Felix as Luka's protege**
      - Tension: he thinks he's ready to take over her job. She doesn't; she's so mired in her "protect everyone" mindset that she doesn't

want to let him take on too much responsibility, since that would potentially put him in danger

- **Better title for Luka than General**
  - She's not a general, she's more of a... codified folk hero. Her job is literally to protect the people of the town against such creatures as demons and dragons and etc. etc.
  - Captain?
  - City-knight?
- Introduce Resurrectionists earlier, and also people who don't think Alistair is dead
- Also, more people who think things were better before Alistair went and became dead
- Second act:
  - Eh, not so bad.
  - Make the crowfolk more intimidating.
- Third act:
  - Include Felix if he's going to be Luka's protege.
  - Him left behind, and Vathys following. Introduce that weird kind of friction of Luka running off with Vath more than Felix, and Felix's worry that he's being replaced
  - But also he and Vath are genuine friends, so!!!
  - Abberline kind of came out of nowhere and then never came back, so *fix that somehow*

- Fourth act:
  - Better pacing and “where are they”ing
- Fifth act:
  - Less exposition, or at least exposition in a more interesting form
- Show the scars of Alistair upon Bethany more clearly throughout the script. Why is he so reviled and feared?
- **Beatrice’s cartel:** they genuinely want to help increase scientific and medical knowledge because *that’s how they keep their families safe!!*
- First act: After teaser, start with Dr. Plass performing a public dissection with a cadaver provided unto him by Beatrice’s cartel. Vathys is in the audience. Vathys at the end has a coughing fit, the doctor reprimands her for coming out when ill, she says it’s a blood disease. Not contagious.

“The body is the mind is the soul.”

“Are you aware of the source of that philosophy?”

“Alistair -----”

“Alistair *Soulthief*.”

## TEASER

FADE IN:

INT. THE LAZARIUM - GREAT HALL - NIGHT

Throughout the citadel HOWLS the rage of war.

Two armies clash: one of flesh and blood MEN AND WOMEN, patchwork, desperate invaders. The other is of METAL SOLDIERS - tall, bladed, faceless. The soldiers are outnumbered, but fight with eerie coordination.

A MAN strikes off the arm of a metal soldier, sending gears and cogs FLYING. These aren't men. They're CLOCKWORK ABOMINATIONS.

Immediately, the soldier retaliates with its remaining arm, knocking the man to the ground. It raises its blade for the KILLING BLOW.

BUT.

An ARMORED YOUNG MAN catches the blade on his shield. His mace comes down hard on arm, BREAKING IT OFF. Another strike to its HEAD - to its CHEST - and DOWN the soldier goes. Puppet whose strings were cut. From the 'corpse' bleeds a milky, translucent smoke.

The young man turns, helping the man to his feet. This is FELIX SOLAS, and he's going to save the world.

FELIX

You alright?

MAN

Where's the general?

As Felix jogs off to another part of the fray:

FELIX

Cutting off the head!

INT. THE LAZARIUM - LABORATORY - CONTINUOUS

Here is where man makes ruin of man.

The area is dark, unlit from inside. Moonlight spills through tall windows in daggers of light. The clang of battle is a distant white noise.

ALISTAIR SOULTHIEF - early 40s, donned in armored robes, skin-deep humanity - staggers against a window. Blood trickles down the side of his face. He holds a bladed staff in a white knuckled grip.

ALISTAIR

You ever feel we're getting too old  
for this?

From the pitch dark and into the light strides LUKA FORRING. Mid 60s, juggernaut, armed and armored to the teeth. RIGHTEOUS FURY INCARNATE.

LUKA

No.

Alistair spits up blood as he laughs.

Luka falls upon him like a tidal wave, a landslide. Alistair dodges only just. Wholly on the defensive.

CRASH. Her mace splinters a table. BANG. It slams into a bookshelf. Alistair dodges - parries - tries to retaliate but NO. He's a wolf at war with a grizzly bear, and he's tiring.

She swings at his head - he ducks, rolls -

- sees a chance, and LURCHES FORWARD -

CRUNCH!

Luka SHRIEKS. He's stabbed her leg!

Alistair wrenches back, scrabbling, but Luka's faster.

The mace CRACKS against the staff, breaking it in two. The blade goes skittering into the dark. She swings AGAIN - catches Soulthief in the chest.

He flies - with a THUD crashes to the floor. Lies there, broken, bleeding, just trying to breathe.

Luka limps forward in painful determination. Time to end this.

Looking past Luka, staring into the dark, Alistair tries to smile.

Luka raises her mace high -

ALISTAIR  
This will haunt you, General.

- and with a roar, sends it CRASHING DOWN UPON -

EXT. PASSENGER SHIP - MAIN DECK - DAY

VATHYS NATHRE'S head knocks against the taffrail. Late teens, a scrawny little thing with her father's eyes and SOMETHING ELSE!!!!. Currently sporting an unhealthy pallor and blaring headache. Wrapped around the rail to anchor herself against the roiling of the sea.

A cheerful fellow PASSENGER pats her back. Her grip on the rail tightens.

PASSENGER  
Bad time to find out you're seasick,  
eh?

VATHYS  
(three seconds away from vomiting)  
I'm fine.

PASSENGER  
First time to Bethany?

Vathys takes a moment to let her stomach settle.

VATHYS  
Hasn't really been a safe place to  
visit lately, has it.

PASSENGER  
Oh, they fixed that months ago.  
General Forring exorcised that old  
ghost.

Still bent over the rail, Vathys peeks up, and looks to the horizon.

There, past the fog: the shining CITY OF BETHANY.

And past it, in the distance, looming like a spike of pure shadow - THE LAZARIUM.

VATHYS  
Heard about that.

Hidden beneath her body, clutched firmly in one hand: the



blade of Alistair's staff.

# ACT I

EXT. BETHANY - AFTERNOON

A foggy, gray metropolis of cobblestone and brick. This is a place which breeds Jack the Rippers.

In the distance, inland, looms a massive black spire - the Lazarium.

EXT. BETHANY - WHARF - CONTINUOUS

Busy day on the docks. Ships are stocked, cargo is unloaded. FISHERMEN, WHALERS, DOCKWORKERS, SAILORS all go about their business.

From the gangplank of a

PASSENGER SHIP

disembark weary PASSENGERS - among them our Vathys Nathre, bag slung over her shoulder, small and alone and unafraid.

She drinks in the sight, calculating. Her eyes settle inevitably on the Lazarium in the distance.

VATHYS

Bit ostentatious, you'd think.

No one responds to her; there's nothing so strange about talking to oneself a little bit.

She makes her way onto the

BOARDWALK

whereupon MISCELLANEOUS VENDORS shout their wares at the passersby. Sketchy place, tailored towards catering and conning naive tourists fresh off the boat.

A PEDDLER sidles into Vathys' space, not quite slick as oil.

PEDDLER

Hey there, sweetheart, how you doing,  
liking our city? Enjoying sweet  
Bethany? Feelin' safe?

VATHYS

Extremely.

She keeps walking, and he keeps pace with vulture

persistence.

PEDDLER

Maybe you shouldn't, you know, it gets  
real dangerous 'round here at night.

From his jacket he pulls out a string upon which hangs small  
metal trinkets.

PEDDLER (CONT'D)

These are straight from the black  
tower, genuine hemo-metal talismans  
forged by the Thief himself to protect  
his favorite patrons. For only a  
pittance you can -

Vathys raises a hand. The tips of her fingers emit an orange  
infernal glow. The skin blackens.

VATHYS

*Ignakus.*

Smoke curls up from the trinkets as they start smoldering.

PEDDLER

No!

The peddler swiftly pulls them away from her, carefully  
padding them, tamping down the embers before they become  
flames. Vathys takes the chance to slip away from him.

VATHYS

I'll do fine on my own, thanks.

PEDDLER

Hope a crow eats you! Bleedin' hedge  
witch!

And Vathys grins, grins, grins.

EXT. BETHANY - EARLY EVENING

The narrow, weathered streets are sparsely populated by  
PEDESTRIANS, nothing like the raucous crush of the docks.

Vathys trots down a sidewalk carelessly, looking occasionally  
at whatever building happens to catch her eye.

VATHYS

508 Saltzmann Boulevard. Saltzmann,  
Saltzmann... Salty Man.

She smiles. God, she's so clever.

That smile falls quick, though, as her steps stutter to a stop, and Vathys

Picking a street at seemingly random, she walks -

- wait. Stop. She pauses, eyes narrowing and head cocked in contemplation. Almost like she's listening for something.

VATHYS (CONT'D)

Can't get any more lost, I suppose.

When she starts walking again, it's down an entirely different street.

VATHYS (CONT'D)

And if you roam around enough,  
eventually you're going to end up in  
the right place.

She treks on, determined to prove her own words. Walks along the street, shoulders back, head high -

- and passes an alley just as LAUGHTER spills from it.

Vathys stops. Backtracks. Looks into the

ALLEY

to see the rickety set-up of a PUPPET SHOW, à la Punch and Judy. Its audience of ADULTS AND CHILDREN watch, enraptured. Vathys joins them, curious.

The show is a parody of the TEASER. Toy METAL SOLDIERS "march" in step until a mob of PUPPET PEOPLE descends upon them from the other side of the stage, flailing at the soldiers in a frenzy. It's a mess.

From under the stage, two PUPPETEERS speak as their puppets fight.

PUPPET PERSON

This is for me husband!

PUPPET SOLDIER

I am your husband!

The Puppet Person pauses their assault. Looks towards the audience.

PUPPET PERSON  
No wonder you're so cold.

Then bashes the soldier dead.

The audience laughs. Vathys almost smiles - it's almost funny.

The mob overwhelms the soldiers. Tiny, cheap cogs and springs go flying as the soldiers "die."

The audience claps as the armies disappear underneath the stage. Vathys hunches forward, coughing WETLY into her sleeve. Consumption?

She moves on, crossing between audience and stage to make her way to the other end of the alley. As she glances at the puppet stage, we see the telltale ruby drops of blood flecking her lips.

Onto the stage pop PUPPET-LUKA and PUPPET-ALISTAIR.

Vathys inhales sharply. Looks away. Hastens to escape.

PUPPET-ALISTAIR (O.S.)  
Looks like somebody's already dressed  
up for the job!

Behind her back, the audience boos.

She exits from the alley and onto another

STREET

and slams into a YOUNG MAN with a CRACK of skulls and shouts of surprise.

They stagger back, from each other. As he looks up, we realize - this is Felix Solas, more a boy than a savior out of armor, but kind and brave as ever.

And, currently, tripping over himself with remorse.

FELIX  
Oh, I'm so sorry!

VATHYS  
(like she's any less guilty)  
Should watch where you're going a  
little better.

He laughs awkwardly. Guilt leaves him so wrong-footed.

FELIX

Yeah, that's fair.

(looks at her face)

Oh, wow, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to, ah...

Confusion overtakes Vathys. Didn't mean to what?

Felix gestures to her face. Specifically, her mouth.

Realization dawns; flushing, she scrubs her sleeve across her face to wipe away the blood.

VATHYS

No worries, it's wasn't - you. Just a consequence of a blood disease.

FELIX

Oh. Is there anything I can...?

Vathys shakes her head. Don't worry about it.

VATHYS

I'm seeing a Doctor Plass for it tomorrow.

FELIX

That's good. I know him, he's brilliant. Again, I'm so sorry, I'll get out of your way now. Good evening.

He shuffles away, about to walk on away, when -

VATHYS

One thing first, please.

He pauses.

FELIX

Yes?

VATHYS

I'm looking for someplace. 508 Salty Mann Boule- Saltzmann Boulevard.

FELIX

The Whale Jaw Pub?

At her nod, Felix brightens up. He can help!

FELIX (CONT'D)

It's just down this lane, not far at all.

He indicates the street behind Vathys. She twists around, looking the way she'd not gone.

VATHYS

Of course it is.

With a deep breath, she comes to terms with how much a fool she almost was.

FELIX

I'm actually looking for a place to eat. If this doesn't seem too untoward, or as though I make of myself an imposition, I could go there with you?

Vathys stares at him flatly. The awkwardness of before creeps back into his voice.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Or not. I leave it entirely up to you. I don't want you to feel -

VATHYS

Imposed?

He winces, pulling further away.

VATHYS (CONT'D)

It's fine. You can pay to make up for the concussion.

Tension melts from Felix, and the smile he gives her is radiant as the sun. He holds out his hand.

FELIX

Felix Solas. It's a pleasure to meet you.

She only hesitates a little before taking it.

VATHYS

Vathys Nathre.

They let go, and then set out together through the dark night.

INT. WHALE JAW PUB - CONTINUOUS

Cacophonous and sweltering with the sanguine bloat of the dinner rush. WORKING CLASS PATRONS eat, drink, and unwind after another grueling day. Hanging across the top of the bar are the long, bleached lines of the eponymous whale jawbones.

From the door leading to the KITCHENS exits a SERVER, arms laden with a platter containing two meals and drinks. With the fluidity of long experience, they maneuver between patrons and tables.

They stop before a booth tucked into the corner, whereupon Vathys and Felix sit opposite each other. Despite the heat, Vathys rubs her hands together as though still cold.

SERVER

Here you are, loves.

They begin setting down the glasses just as:

VATHYS

Ignakus.

A magical orange glow emits from her fingers once more. She blows on them softly, and true flames lick across her skin. She rubs her hands together as though slathering them in the flame.

The server nearly drops the glass, jolting Felix and Vathys.

SERVER

My apologies, ma'am, I'll just finish up here.

They swiftly unload the rest of the dinners and then hasten a retreat. Vathys watches them dully. Too used to that kind of reaction.

Felix, meanwhile, is mortified with secondhand embarrassment.

FELIX

Forgive them, please. Sorcerers aren't very common in Bethany these days.

She sighs tiredly as she picks at her dinner.

VATHYS

Of course they are. Just not the kind of sorcerers people generally want to host in their cities.

He avoids her gaze as he digs into his food.

FELIX

'Host' is perhaps too cavalier a term.

VATHYS

That bad?

FELIX

Soulthief isn't a surname earned by passivity. He murdered thousands, took their souls, and desecrated the remains. That black tower?

Vathys nods. Her gaze wanders over to the bar. Raised voices and tension herald a fight slowly simmering between a few PATRONS.

FELIX (CONT'D)

His Lazarium. Full to bursting with whatever atrocity he could think of. A mechanical army powered by our families' souls somehow was the least of his sins.

VATHYS

Surprised you haven't torn it down brick by brick yet.

Felix snorts into his cup.

FELIX

Can't. Wards came back up after Soulthief died.

He looks over, alerted to the raised voices at the bar.

FELIX (CONT'D)

General Forring's convinced they're powered by some sort of perpetual soul engine, but the Marquess isn't interested in finding out.

VATHYS

And the army?

She stares at him, unblinking, totally focused. The intensity is searing, but he doesn't noticed, too busy keeping an eye on the situation at the bar.



FELIX

Still there. We couldn't destroy them  
all when we assaulted Lazarium, and  
now we can't get back in.

Vathys blinks. Relaxes.

VATHYS

Wonder what his plans were for them.

FELIX

Conquest. Why else build an army?

VATHYS

Boredom?

CRASH!

The shatter of glass, the SHOUTS of patrons - at the bar  
brews a brawl.

Felix slides from the booth swiftly, ready to go break up the  
fight before he remembers he isn't alone.

FELIX

I need to help with that.

VATHYS

Don't knock out their teeth.

He laughs, genuine at last. The smile he gives is as warm and  
beaming as sunlight.

FELIX

I hope Doctor Plass can help you, Miss  
Nathre.

Vathys' responding grin is a poor reflection.

VATHYS

Don't we all. Be seeing you, Mister  
Solas.

With a nod of his head, Felix hurries to the fight. He peels  
brawlers away from each other, shouting, but his voice is  
lost in the din.

Vathys watches, sipping idly from her cup.

INT. WHALE JAW PUB - VATHYS' ROOM - LATER

The CLICK of gas lamp igniting, as Vathys' fingers twist it on, chasing away the darkness with warm orange light. She drops her papers precariously close to the lamp, onto a scratched and dented desk.

VATHYS

Worry about it later.

She drops her bag on the floor and collapses onto the lone, rickety bed.

Pale moonlight filters in through a window, lending her a cadaverous pallor. Vathys closes her eyes - she needs a moment.

Noise outside draws her attention. Sitting up, she moves over to the window to look at the

STREET BELOW

as patrons exit the inn (in various stages of sobriety) - including one Felix Solas, supporting the weight of another, clearly injured man.

Vathys watches him, brow furrowed, mental cogs turning. An idea starts to form...

And then dies as a round of hacking, pneumonic COUGHING wracks through her body.

She pushes away from the window to curl in on herself.

VATHYS (CONT'D)

(who're you convincing?)

This is fine, this is -

(interrupted by coughing)

- entirely fine. Completely reversible.

The bout wears off. She wipes her mouth clumsily with her sleeve with a noise of disgust. Sickness is so nasty.

Too exhausted to do anything else, she halfheartedly kicks off her boots. Turns her face back toward the window. No one lingers outside any longer, save a tall, fully robed PERSON walking briskly down the street.

VATHYS (CONT'D)

Going to see Plass in the morning, and

everything will be so very. Very.

Bathed in the silver moonlight, she looks more ghost than girl.

VATHYS (CONT'D)

Fine.

What a tired lie.

ACT II

EXT. BETHANY - STREET - LATE MORNING

An upscale residential area. The street is lazy with RESIDENTS strolling along the sidewalks. Carriages drawn by well-groomed horses trot by leisurely. This is not a place of toil.

Vathys sticks out in her patchwork garb. She walks along the sidewalk, glancing between the buildings and a letter in her hand. Some pedestrians look to her strangely. A burglar in bright daylight?

She's just lost again.

VATHYS

You'd think there'd be a sign, some  
sort of advertisement.

Down she walks, passing residence after residence, squinting at addresses, squinting at the letter - past one, past two, three, four -

- over the din of the people comes a WHISPER on the wind -

Vathys stops. Looks back at one of the houses.

It calls to her.

She approaches the door. Hesitant. Suspicious.

A neat plaque near the door proclaims: OFFICES OF DOCTOR  
ROBERT PLASS.

There's her sign.

VATHYS (CONT'D)

Oh, shut up.

She knocks sharply at the door.

No one answers.

Raps again, harder and louder, to the same effect.

How irritating. Vathys grasps at the door handle, jiggling it in frustration -

- and, unexpectedly, the door opens.

INT. DR. PLASS' RESIDENCE - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

No candle nor electricity lights the hall. It falls back to darkness as soon as Vathys closes the door with a sepulchral creak. Shuts out the light of day, the noise of morning.

A mausoleum hush.

VATHYS

Where are the servants?

Only the groan of pipework in the walls answers her.

She walks forward, cautious. Straining to hear any sign of life.

A WHISPER. The same quiet calling as before.

Vathys follows it. Drawn further into the dark.

From a sheath at her side, she pulls out a knife. Holds it tight,

Down the hall, beyond a closed door, comes the murmur of a VOICE.

DOCTOR PLASS (O.S.)

Please, I don't know why he won't  
answer -

A rapid CLICKING noise interjects.

DOCTOR PLASS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I did everything right, I swear, I  
would never lie to you.

He cuts off with a gurgle as Vathys opens the door to the

SITTING ROOM

and goes cold.

DOCTOR PLASS (50's) stares in glassy horror at the arm buried in his chest, holding him aloft. Heavy, ragged black robes cover his MURDERER from head to toe, not a scrap of flesh to be seen.

They stand just outside a circle of salt, dotted by candles, drawn onto the floor.

The Murderer turns their head sharply toward Vathys,

revealing a skeletal avian mask for a face. They issue another crow-like CLICKING noise.

They are not human. They have never been human.

Vathys takes a tremulous step forward. The Murderer tilts their head. Clacks in curiosity.

The Murderer drops Plass to the ground with a heavy THUD. His corpse falls partly on the salt circle, destroying it.

Vathys shudders. A taut leash suddenly cut short.

The Murderer CROAKS. They stumble back. GLASS SHATTERS as they launch themselves out a window.

VATHYS

No!

Vathys lurches into action, chasing after them -

- takes a moment to check Plass' condition (very dead) -
- before grasping the window frame -
- the broken glass SLICES her hands bloody -
- and hauls herself out.

EXT. BETHANY - ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Her head whips around, seeking the Murderer, but they're nowhere to be seen.

A noise above. She looks -

Preternatural in their grace, the Murderer leaps from windowsill to balcony. They pause. Glance back down at Vathys. They trill, then cross from one building to the next.

Going - going - soon to be gone.

Vathys runs after them. Desperate. She brings her bloodied hands to her face, whispering urgently to - to what?

To the blood?

The Murderer jumps from one building to the next -

- Vathys SNARLS -

- an unseen force YANKS at their leg - they fall, shrieking -
- to slam onto the ground with a bone-shattering CRACK.

Vathys stumbles to a stop a short distance from them. She sways, suddenly exhausted.

The Murderer scrabbles up, dazed, to stagger out of the alley, into the middle of the

STREET

PEDESTRIANS scream and back away from the Murderer. Recognition and TERROR.

MAN #1  
Resurrectionist!

WOMAN #1  
Fetch a guard!

Vathys stumbles out from the alley.

The Murderer pays the pedestrians no mind. They wheel back, arm raised in accusation, SCREECHING at Vathys. BETRAYER!

BANG!

The bullet SLAMS into the Murderer's chest.

Vathys scrabbles to a stop, mouth agape in awe, in terror -

As General Luka Forring enters view.

She's out of armor and into day clothes more appropriate for a morning walk. Her gait is uneven, practically a limp as she favors her uninjured leg. Armed with a cane and a smoking gun.

The Murderer croaks at her, enraged.

Luka cocks the hammer. She's so very weary of this game.

They LUNGE -

BANG!

The Murderer EXPLODES into a flurry of feathers and furious, squawking crows. Robes disintegrate.

Only the mask remains to clatter onto the cobblestones.

Luka watches the murder fly away, tracking the direction the crows go.

VATHYS  
(oh god, no)  
Preserve my soul.

Luka looks to Vathys - bleeding hands and bloody mouth, pale and trembling with terror and fatigue - before walking to her, driven by concern and an unaccountable sense of disturbance.

VATHYS (CONT'D)  
Doctor Plass is dead. It killed him.

The mystery can wait. Luka points at a pedestrian.

LUKA  
Fetch a guard. Inform them that  
Detective Morrick is needed at Doctor  
Plass' offices - and a forensics team.

The pedestrian is all too happy to comply.

LUKA (CONT'D)  
(to Vathys)  
You. Come with me. You may yet be  
needed.  
(to the crowd)  
Quit GAWKING and move along!

She sets out for Doctor Plass' office. Vathys follows reluctantly.

As they walk:

LUKA (CONT'D)  
You saw it kill Doctor Plass?

VATHYS  
Yes. It... tore out his heart, I  
think.

LUKA  
How were you injured?

VATHYS  
Pardon?

Luka indicates Vathys' face.



LUKA

Your mouth.

VATHYS

Blood disease, I'm coughing it up by  
the bucket. Hands are from jumping  
through a broken window.

It doesn't sound like a lie. But Luka is hardly appeased.

Something is so off about her.

LUKA

I presume you are new to Bethany.

VATHYS

Ship pulled in yesterday. Are killer  
plague doctors a usual sight here,  
'cause -

LUKA

The most popular term for them is  
'crowfolk.'

VATHYS

That implies 'yes.'

LUKA

Unfortunately.

The streets are all but empty. Doors shut tight, carriages  
gone, nothing like the easy crowd of earlier.

But from the windows peek many eyes.

Upon reaching the front door of

DOCTOR PLASS' RESIDENCE

Luka stops. Vathys follows suit.

Luka leans in conspiratorially, voice lowered to avoid being  
overheard. Her eyes roam the street, watching out for the  
forensics team, another crowfolk - anything.

LUKA (CONT'D)

Have you been familiarized with the  
Resurrectionists?

VATHYS

Corpse takers. Murdering doctors seems

uneconomical of them.

LUKA

Not them. While the name is derived from the corpse takers, the persons of whom I speak are even more malignant.

The conspiracy crumbles as Vathys reels back. Seriously?

VATHYS

Not fond of dissection, madam?

LUKA

It is not in my nature to condone illegal desecration.  
(looks down)  
Give me your hands.

Sizzling irritation melts Vathys' fear. The narrow-mindedness galls her.

VATHYS

Can save a lot of lives with what you learn from studying the dead.

LUKA

We are capable of many things once we cast off our sense of humanity. Your hands, please.

Stiffly, Vathys obeys. Her hands are still bleeding sluggishly. Luka unsheathes a pocket knife and, without preamble, cuts strips out of her own clothing.

LUKA (CONT'D)

The Resurrectionists I speak of are followers of the Soulthief.

VATHYS

I heard he was dead.

With the strips, Luka sets to binding Vathys' Lukas.

LUKA

Yes, but many atrocities linger long after their end. He's one of them.

VATHYS

Haunting by proxy?

Luka FREEZES. Looks sharply at Vathys, searching for - what?

LUKA

I do not believe I introduced myself  
to you. Luka Forri-

VATHYS

Luka Forring, yeah. Heard about you.  
You've got that dragonslayer look  
about you.

The tension doesn't quite bleed away, but sound Luka makes is  
nearly a laugh.

LUKA

Have I, now.

She ties the impromptu bandages off.

Far away, but coming closer: POLICE SIRENS. Luka's head snaps  
to the sound.

LUKA (CONT'D)

Morricks will have a medic with him.  
Have the wounds redressed and see if  
you require stitches.

Vathys flexes her hands. Grits her teeth against the pain.

VATHYS

Temporary measures.

She looks across the street - just as a curtain is closed.

ACT III

INT. DR. PLASS' RESIDENCE - SITTING ROOM - LATER

SNAP!

The harsh phosphorous FLASH lights up Doctor Plass's sightless face in unkind starkness.

SNAP! - the candles, burnt out, loom like citadels high above the ring of salt, bone-white amidst a grainy black void.

SNAP! - the broken glass of the window gleams, ice at the edge of a glacial lake.

The FORENSIC PHOTOGRAPHER moves on mechanically, documenting the slaughter.

CONSTABLES meander through the room, ostensibly conducting an investigation. Takes books from the shelves and skim them. Rustle papers. Everyone keeps a wide berth from the corpse.

Save two.

DETECTIVE ABBERLINE MORRICK crouches outside the salt circle. Late 40s, gray and craggy, bulldog of a man. His gaze flits from detail to detail, consuming each individual grain. He's spent too long hunting stale trails to dead ends. What he needs is something fresh.

Hands resting comfortably atop her cane, Luka stands near him, taking in the whole of the grisly scene.

ABBERLINE

(without looking up)

We have a man tracking down the widow.

You want to deliver the news?

LUKA

Of course.

Abberline reaches out and closes Plass' eyes. The man is owed that much.

ABBERLINE

Alistair Soulthief is dead. This should have ended.

LUKA

It is ending.

ABBERLINE

Be sure to tell that to the widow.

VATHYS (O.S.)

DAMN IT!

Abberline bolts up as if SHOT. Luka reaches for her gun, ready to fight -

But there's nothing.

Across the room, a MEDIC tends to Vathys' wounds - or is trying to, if the bottle of peroxide in his hand is any indicator. Luka's impromptu bandages lie in a filthy pile at their feet.

Vathys, SNARLING, holds her hands to her chest, as the medic tries to coerce her into him resume his treatment.

Abberline observes her curiously.

ABBERLINE

He had an appointment with a Vathys  
Nathre today, according to his  
planner. That her?

LUKA

(nodding)

She arrived by ship yesterday.

Curiosity sharpens to unblinking focus. At last: something for the Detective to sink his teeth into.

ABBERLINE

Bit young to be travelling alone. Did  
she say which ship?

Luka glares at him, catching on immediately.

LUKA

If you are accusing a child of  
consorting with these monsters -

ABBERLINE

No accusations. But it doesn't strike  
you as odd, she witnesses a crow kill  
a man and what slices her up is the  
window?

Luka looks back to Vathys. Slowly, Vathys holds out one of her hands for the medic to disinfect. She's blanched pale as

a ghost from the pain.

Looking over, she catches Luka's eye. Bares her teeth in a rictus of a grin. Luka aches with sympathy.

Abberline, studying her, comes to a heartbreaking realization.

ABBERLINE (CONT'D)  
(a low blow and he knows it)  
She is not Alice.

The room chills. Luka could be carved from stone, from ice. Whatever bud of warmth she'd nurtured withers on the vine. She clenches her cane in a white-knuckled grip.

LUKA  
I am aware.

She stands still, almost monumental. Abberline leaves her there, and makes his way to Vathys.

A constable intercepts him. In his hands he holds a dark book.

CONSTABLE #1  
Sir, you need to see this.

Abberline waves him off, not even stopping.

ABBERLINE  
Not now.

The constable flounders in his wake; then has a brilliant idea.

CONSTABLE #1  
General Forring!

He approaches her.

LUKA  
What.

While holding out the book:

CONSTABLE #1  
You need to see this, ma'am.

She takes it mechanically. Opens it -

- and the avalanche under her skin disappears.

For she recognizes this book.

CORNER OF THE ROOM

The medic is tying off Vathys' new bandages. As Abberline approaches, he hears:

MEDIC

Change bandages twice a day, minimum.  
Wash with soap and water in between  
changes.

Vathys isn't even paying attention.

Abberline stops at them just as the medic finishes up.

MEDIC (CONT'D)

Avoid undue stress to the flesh, else  
you might end up needing stitches  
after all.

He stands, holding a black doctor's bag. Nods his head to Abberline.

MEDIC (CONT'D)

Sir.

He walks away. Leaves Abberline to loom over Vathys, who sits caged between them and the wall.

ABBERLINE

Afternoon. Vathys Nathre? I'm  
Abberline Morricks, head detective.

Vathys frowns up at him. Walking around a crime scene, carrying a notepad, and dressed like that - who else could he have been?

VATHYS

Are you now.

The smile he gives her is not nice.

ABBERLINE

Indeed. I have some questions to ask  
you, in regards to what you witnessed  
of Doctor Plass' death.

VATHYS

I was under the impression doctors  
were the natural prey of grotesque  
bird monsters.

Abberline takes notes as they speak.

ABBERLINE

And how did you come to that  
conclusion?

VATHYS

First impressions, and all. I walked  
in, and Doctor Plass was hanging from  
their arm, like a...

She holds out one of her own arms in pantomime, hand curled  
into a claw around an unseen heart.

VATHYS (CONT'D)

An apple on a tree. Then they just -  
dropped him. Onto the salt.

ABBERLINE

Sounds like you spooked them.

Vathys snorts. What a bad joke. She stands slowly, and braces  
against the vertigo.

VATHYS

No, they were done with Plass. He  
wasn't being very helpful.

That catches Abberline's attention.

VATHYS (CONT'D)

You got anything to eat?

SALT CIRCLE

Luka flips through the book, devouring it hungrily.

LUKA

Where did you find this?

CONSTABLE #1

Under Doctor Plass' desk, ma'am, under  
some overturned paperwork.

LUKA

Wonderful. Dismissed.



The constable complies immediately. Luka pays him no mind, engrossed in the book.

No. Not a book.

This is a GRIMOIRE.

The text is handwritten in an indecipherable language, broken up by illustrations, next to which hasty notes have been scrawled:

A spirit, rising like smoke from a body.

A small jewelry box, overflowing with sheets of paper upon which more indecipherable text has been written.

Luka flips through the pages, skimming hastily, dread building quietly the more she sees.

Springs of asphodel - a circle of runes - long lists of otherworldly formulae -

And then she stops.

On one page, etched in painstaking detail: the crowfolk, with an unsettling addition: a massive coffin, strapped across its back.

On the other: Alistair Soulthief, staff in hand.

And Luka has seen enough.

With a SNAP, she shuts the book, and makes off towards the door.

CORNER OF THE ROOM

Abberline taps his pencil against his notepad. Vathys leans heavily against the wall, nibbling on a piece of candy. A bit of vitality has returned to her body, thanks to the food.

ABBERLINE

Who were they trying to speak to?

Vathys holds up a finger - she's still chewing.

After swallowing:

VATHYS

Plass didn't say names, just that  
whomever he was calling wasn't

answering.

Abberline jots some notes down. Vathys bites off a piece of her candy.

ABBERLINE

Did you hear -

A heavy TAP TAP TAP interrupts him, and they both look over as Luka leaves the salt circle, making her way toward the door.

ABBERLINE (CONT'D)

(to Vathys)

Wait here.

He walks off. Vathys makes a vague noise of agreement, attention already turned back to her candy.

Abberline approaches Luka, seeking to gain her attention.

ABBERLINE (CONT'D)

According to the girl, the crow wasn't just here to kill Plass.

Luka walks right by him, practically ignoring him.

LUKA

Continue without me. This investigation takes me elsewhere.

ABBERLINE

Luka?

She holds up the grimoire.

IN THE CORNER

Vathys, watching them, goes still.

BACK TO LUKA

LUKA

Without me, detective.

Regardless, Abberline makes to follow after her, but from the

BACK ALLEY

we hear:

CONSTABLE #2 (O.S.)  
Sir! You need to see this!

Abberline vacillates. Then:

ABBERLINE  
We're not finished with this!

And then he turns to the constable, and goes to the window.

IN THE CORNER

Luka passes by Vathys - who watches her like a hawk - to disappear into the hallway. Vathys watches after her, head cocked. Thinking.

Listening?

A decision is made. Vathys sighs in defeat.

VATHYS  
This is a terrible idea.

She looks around, making sure no one is paying attention to her.

They aren't; Detective Morrick is holding a conversation at the window, and the other constables focus on other matters.

Vathys pops the last of the candy into her mouth. Then hastens into the hallway, chasing Luka through the dark.

INT. BETHANY - APARTMENT ACROSS THE STREET - CONTINUOUS

A hand - fine, smooth, aristocratic - delicately holds back a curtain. Its OWNER, a man hidden in shadow, peers surreptitiously out at the street.

THROUGH THE WINDOW

we see Luka stride swiftly out of Plass' office, relentless as an oncoming storm. The book is clutched at her side in a white-knuckled grip.

Vathys leaves the office as well, hot on Luka's heels.

THE MAN  
Well now.

Vathys appears to yell something at Luka, who does not respond at all.

A MAN

Keep an eye on them, if you please.

As he puts the curtain back in place, the low chattering of a CROWFOLK answers him.

EXT. BETHANY - STREET - CONTINUOUS

There's a steadier crowd now, the lazy rush of PEOPLE going about their daily business once more. Luka parts through them with the thoughtless ease of Moses through the Red Sea.

Vathys treads through rougher waters, as she follows in Luka's wake.

VATHYS

Stop walking so fast!

It does not have the desired effect.

LUKA

(looking straight ahead)  
Hasn't Detective Morrick more questions for you?

VATHYS

Probably.

LUKA

Then go answer them.

VATHYS

While you run off and actually accomplish something? Perish the thought.

Luka closes her eyes. Searches for patience she does not have right now.

As Vathys catches up to her, Luka stills at the edge of the street.

LUKA

You belabor under certain delusions, child.

VATHYS

Circuitous way of telling someone to blight off.

Wheeling down their way in a clatter of hooves on

cobblestones is a HANSOM CAB. Its DRIVER catches sight of Luka.

LUKA  
Not especially.

She tilts her chin up. It's all she needs to do to beckon them over. Everyone in this town knows her.

The driver smiles happily down at her as they pull up next to her.

DRIVER  
Pleasure to serve, General. Anywhere you want.

LUKA  
Caltus Warehouse.  
(when the driver blanches)  
Or as close as you dare.

Luka yanks open the door to the cab, and throws her cane in. She climbs in - grimaces in PAIN when she puts weight on her weak leg.

Vathys tries to step in after her - keyword, TRIES -

- for the head of Luka's cane JABS her in the chest, knocking her off the cab to stumble back onto the sidewalk.

One fist presses against the area of impact - that bloody HURT!

VATHYS  
Oi!

Luka hooks the head of her cane against the window frame of the cab casually.

LUKA  
Was that too oblique?

Vathys SNEERS. Luka gives her a flat look, then pulls the door shut. Obediently, the driver flicks the reins, and the cab LURCHES forward, leaving Vathys stranded on the sidewalk.

She rubs at her chest. Shakes her head, a dog chasing off flies, chasing off an absolutely terrible idea.

The cab drives away further and further.

Faintly, the fingers at her side glow orange.

IN THE CAB

The grimoire lays open in Luka's lap. Alistair Soulthief and the crowfolk stare up at her.

Luka's mouth curls. Absently, she drums one hand against her injured leg.

From outside, a WHOOSH of air catches her attention...

Just before a FIREBALL bursts outside the window.

OUTSIDE

The horses scream and scamper in TERROR! The driver pulls on the reins, shushing them, trying to regain control.

INSIDE

Luka reaches inside her coat. Pulls out her gun.

The door OPENS -

- the hammer CLICKS with lethal finality -
- as she levels the gun with Vathys' head.

Vathys stares at it dully. Expected this.

VATHYS

I'm not so skilled as to scatter a murder of crows with one bullet, but I have tricks.

She holds up her on-fire hand, and wriggles her fingers.

Luka's gun doesn't waver.

DRIVER (O.S.)

Ma'am?

LUKA

Remain where you are.

(to Vathys)

Do you think I am going someplace exciting, some grand adventure? That crow is not the only dangerous thing in this city.

VATHYS  
Says the lady holding the gun.

Vathys grins hideously.

VATHYS (CONT'D)  
This corruption of the blood is going  
to kill me, General. Plass was my last  
chance. They've already murdered me. I  
just want to avenge myself before th  
grave catches up.

She tilts her head.

VATHYS (CONT'D)  
If it's all right with you.

Luka holds. The whole world seems to hold its breath.

And to exhale, as Luka lowers the gun, and stows it back into  
her coat.

Vathys crawls into the cab, slamming the door shut behind  
her. The driver hesitates. Luka bangs her fist against the  
cab's wall, and it lurches back into action.

VATHYS (CONT'D)  
So what's at the Caltus Warehouse?

Luka looks down at the grimoire.

LUKA  
If we are fortunate, nothing.

VATHYS  
And if we aren't?

LUKA  
Answers.

Down the streets the cab rides, a speck of black in a city of  
grey.

Atop a roof, perched upon the shingles, another speck of  
black keeps vigil.

The CROWFOLK clatters, head following the cab, watching it  
travel further down the street.

Towards the dread Lazarium.

ACT IV

EXT. BETHANY - CALTUS WAREHOUSE - EVENING

What festers in a marketplace of corpses?

In the waning daylight, DOCTORS stand around tables laden with cadavers, arguing with their respective CORPSE TAKERS over matters of price and quality, the usual haggling business. Others pack bodies into crates laden with quicklime. Some unload the deceased from carts and drop them onto tables. It's not unlike a fish market.

Through this forum wade Luka, bleeding discomfort, and Vathys, electrically FASCINATED. It's all she can do not to lag behind, distracted by this visceral business.

Eyes follow them as they walk. Chatter dies down until they pass by. Neither notice nor pay attention to this - yet.

But everyone in town knows Luka Forring.

VATHYS

This legal?

LUKA

No.

Vathys eyes the grimy windows through which daylight yet streams, the doctors who work with their identities unobscured.

VATHYS

You sure?

LUKA

Officers are not keen to patrol this area. Old superstitions keep them away.

VATHYS

And hush money.

Some workers drop a body onto a table next to her with a meaty THUD, sending up a CLOUD of powdery quicklime. Vathys winces away in disgust.

VATHYS (CONT'D)

So why aren't you arresting them?



LUKA

(how she wishes)

My authority does not extend to this  
sort of law enforcement.

VATHYS

Your detective's minions seemed to  
think otherwise.

LUKA

Matters connected to Alistair  
Soulthief and his straggling  
Resurrectionists are my business. My  
duty is defense of the city against  
threats such as them.

VATHYS

With what army, General?

Luka doesn't answer.

BEATRICE'S CORNER

Partially cordoned off from the rest of the floor by 'walls'  
of packing crates and support beams is what Luka searches  
for: a large, rough woman in a stained apron appraising a  
battered body, brought in by nervous young couple. BEATRICE,  
the boss of this operation.

BEATRICE

Not worth nothing with a big bruise  
like that. Doctors like them pretty as  
brides, and this is -

She looks up, catching sight of Luka. Recognizes her  
instantly. Everyone in this town knows her, after all.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

(to the couple)

Haul it over to Butcher, he'll pay  
more for the parts than you'll get for  
the whole.

They obey swiftly. After they've left, Beatrice leans against  
the newly-bodyless table. Next to her hands are a couple of  
knives.

She looks behind Luka, mockingly searching for someone who is  
not there. You could cut the enmity between them like butter.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)  
 Forget your lapdog at home, your  
 Eminence? I know how you hate kicking  
 us out in the cold without him.

Luka doesn't rise to the bait.

LUKA  
 Beatrice Sutter? Are you familiar with  
 a Doctor Robert Plass?

BEATRICE  
 I'd love to cooperate, Madam Savior of  
 Us All, but part of why I've got a  
 business instead of a bankruptcy is  
 I'm capable of a bit of *surreptition*  
 when the occasion calls for.

While the adults argue, Vathys looks out onto the main floor  
 of the warehouse to observe the other transactions.

LUKA  
 He's dead.

BEATRICE  
 You aiming to sell?

LUKA  
 Murdered by Resurrectionists.

Beatrice blanches.

LUKA (CONT'D)  
 Do you understand what situation you  
 find yourself in now?

A corpse taker drops a bag of quicklime, its sudden white  
 cloud catching Vathys' eye -

- and behind the cloud looms a figure in black, a living  
shadow -

Vathys frowns. What...?

The cloud of lime dissipates, and there is - nothing.

The sneer drops from Beatrice's voice, replaced by  
 defensiveness born of fear.

BEATRICE  
 Just 'cause y'all gave them our name

don't mean we are them, Forring.

LUKA

Then surely you've no reason not to cooperate.

BEATRICE

Apologies if I'm not fond of helping our wannabe executioner.

LUKA

Appealing to the future tenants of the gallows is no more desirous for me, but slaughter makes for strange bedfellows.

They stare one another down, Luka carved from stone and Beatrice a powder keg about to blow.

Then Beatrice shoves away from her table, sending a couple knives clattering to the floor.

BEATRICE

Which friend you looking for?

LUKA

Any.

Beatrice storms away, shoving past Vathys.

VATHYS

Not so popular down here, are you?

LUKA

Courting the favor of grave robbers and dissectors was never high on my list of priorities.

VATHYS

Hope you're still saying that next winter when you're not dying of pneumonia 'cause some genius peeled open a pair of lungs and found out -

A vicious coughing fit interrupts her. Vathys doubles over, hacking up a lung - almost literally.

Luka moves towards her reflexively - but doesn't know what to do. How to fix this. Awkwardly, she settles for placing a hand on Vathys' back.

Vathys grimaces. Deliberately moves away from the touch.

VATHYS (CONT'D)

We're not quite out of the mire of  
mild acquaintanceship yet, General.

LUKA

The scorch marks you left on that cab  
indicated otherwise.

VATHYS

I'm here to witness the uncovering of  
those answers you dread. And to see  
the part played by that dead man's  
diary.

She glances pointedly at the grimoire tucked against Luka's  
side.

LUKA

This wasn't authored by Plass.

VATHYS

So our dead man stole it from the  
library of another dead man. That  
bodes ill for you.

LUKA

Unless the author is still alive.

Impossible. Vathys' expression screws up in confusion,  
incomprehension.

VATHYS

Of course he's dead -

BLOODCURDLING SCREAMS from the main floor interrupts her.  
They capture Luka and Vathys' attention wholly.

The telltale croak of a crow.

Luka moves forward. Shoves the grimoire into Vathys' hands -

LUKA

Stay here.

- and stalks past her while pulling her gun out with her free  
hand. Her gait wobbles a bit; the hand holding the cane falls  
out of sync with her bad leg.

On the

## MAIN FLOOR

is almost a repeat scene.

A crowfolk stands atop a table, holding a snarling, gagging Beatrice aloft by the throat effortlessly. They clatter at her in sharp, distinct clicks. Demanding.

Fear paralyzes the other warehouse residents. Many cower behind crates and under tables, while others stand, too terrified to move. Some corpse takers - caught between their loyalty to their boss and their fear of her assailant.

Luka has no such qualms. She levels the gun on the crowfolk's head. Cocks the hammer.

LUKA (CONT'D)

Alistair!

The crowfolk's head WHIPS AROUND.

Luka SHOOTS.

But the crowfolk moves FASTER. Their head jerks back just before the bullet can hit. It shatters a faraway window.

And pandemonium erupts.

Beatrice seizes the opening. SLAMS her fist into the crowfolk's cheek with a harsh CRACK! of bone against bone - and they don't even notice.

Doctors and corpse takers scramble in a messy evacuation. They rush for their things, rush for the door, just rush AWAY. Some work to pack up the bodies and the materials.

A flick of the crowfolk's wrist, and Beatrice goes sailing through the air. Beatrice crashes onto another table, tumbles off of it, and falls onto the floor.

The crowfolk hops down from the table.

Luka SHOOTS again - the crowfolk evades - the bullet embeds itself in a support beam just above someone's head. Luka snarls -

LUKA (CONT'D)

Blast.

- and points her gun harmlessly at the ceiling as she makes her way towards the crowfolk, shoving through the crowd -

- moving just in time to avoid the KNIFE that sails through the air, right where her head had just been.

Luka ducks. Looks around - where did it come from? - and sights a corpse taker - no, a RESURRECTIONIST - standing atop a table, looking straight at her. He holds more knives.

RESURRECTIONIST #1  
Lord Alistair guide me!

Before Luka can deal with him, the crowfolk falls upon her in a flurry of claws. She retreats awkwardly, using her cane as a defense.

She shoots at their chest, their feet. Trying to gain some breathing room. The two break off, a few feet of distance opening between them.

Luka retreats. The crowfolk advances.

The Resurrectionist looks around, arms outstretched in welcome, as he speaks to the others in the warehouse. His knives glint brightly in his hand. No time like a crisis to proselytize.

RESURRECTIONIST #1 (CONT'D)  
Friends, colleagues, you have nothing to fear here.

A doctor, blind with panic, runs between Luka and the crowfolk. A flash of claws - her blood arcs through the air as the crowfolk tears out her throat.

RESURRECTIONIST #1 (CONT'D)  
We are all of us bound by our sacred work. Uncovering the secrets of death and life.

The crowfolk shove the dying woman at Luka. She catches her, nearly dropping her cane in the process.

It's too much to do at once. Hold the gun. Hold the cane. Hold the doctor. Walk backwards. Luka manages only barely, and the doctor is gasping, the doctor is clawing, drowning, dying - there's nothing Luka can do but how she tries.

The Resurrectionist points a damning knife at Luka.

RESURRECTIONIST #1 (CONT'D)  
But SHE drove us into the dark!

The Resurrectionist throws another knife. Aim was OFF - it hurtles towards the crowfolk's beak, who catches it in midair.

The doctor breathes her last.

Reluctantly, Luka lets the corpse slump to the ground.

RESURRECTIONIST #1 (CONT'D)  
 She would keep us ignorant and ill and  
 DYING for her own squeamish morals!

The crowfolk HURLS the knife at Luka. She almost dodges - but NO. The blade PUNCHES into her gun-toting arm, hilt deep.

She ROARS in pain. Dares not rip out the blade.

RESURRECTIONIST #1 (CONT'D)  
 But death! Death?

He laughs hideously at a joke no one else gets.

Luka raises her gun. Levels it at the crowfolk. Cocks the hammer -

- the Resurrectionist prepares to throw another knife, aim straight and true -

RESURRECTIONIST #1 (CONT'D)  
 Death is but a flaw to be overcome.

- as a FIREBALL slams into him.

He falls off the table, SCREAMING as he burns alive.

Luka turns to see him - so does the crowfolk - and then they both look over to see -

Vathys Nathre, teeth bared, hand outstretched and wreathed in infernal flame.

VATHYS  
 You were saying?

In her other hand, she holds the grimoire against her side. The crowfolk, sighting this, SHRIEKS. No longer concerned with Luka. They've found their TARGET.

They launch forward, barreling towards Vathys. She yelps, scrambling away. Barely avoids the claws that slash at her throat.

VATHYS (CONT'D)  
I thought you killed them!

Luka tracks the crowfolk with her gun.

LUKA  
Evidently, it did not take!

Vathys flings another fireball. Misses. It splatters across a bunch of crates, a support beam, the floor, setting it all alight.

VATHYS  
Have you ever SUCCESSFULLY killed someone?

The fire spreads.

LUKA  
What does THAT mean?

BAM! BAM! BAM! Two shots miss, but the third slams into the crowfolk's shoulder.

The crowfolk LUNGES, trying to grab Vathys. She stumbles back - barely dodges and their claws RAKE across her chest in bloody furrows.

She SCREAMS in pain and falls to the ground. The fire on her hand goes out.

Luka goes pale with horror. Raises her gun, fires WILDLY -

- CLICK CLICK CLICK -

- but she's out of bullets.

Vathys holds the grimoire tight to her chest with her good arm. Desperately, she scrabbles away from the crowfolk, eyes wide, terrified.

Luka snarls, stows away her empty gun. Runs towards Vathys and the crowfolk.

EXCEPT

Her gait is out of sync. She puts too much weight on her bad leg. It crumbles out from under her, her cane SKIDS across the ground out of reach as she crashes onto the floor with a SHOUT -



- and the crowfolk looms tall over Vathys, a living shadow haloed in the fire raging behind them, as they follow her.

Luka tries to stand, but the leg fails - she gropes for her cane, but it's just out of reach.

She watches, helpless, as the crowfolk reaches down with black claws towards Vathys, whose mouth moves faster and faster -

- the SHATTERING of a window drowns out all other noise -

- as Vathys becomes a shadow.

Luka stills in shock.

A smoky outline inhabits the space Vathys occupied, ephemeral and intangible. The crowfolk cocks their head as they crouch as Vathys' feet. Curious.

But more - so much more - near Vathys' head draws Luka's attention. She blinks rapidly, as though adjusting to a sudden change in light, as she sees - she SEES -

Kneeling on the floor, one hand on her smoky shoulder and the other braced against his knee, dressed in the same armored robes he'd been wearing when Luka killed him - Alistair Soulthief stares up at the crowfolk, irritated.

LUKA (CONT'D)

Alistair?

He looks down to Vathys - then double takes when he meets Luka's eyes, surprise as deep as her own flitting across his face.

And then -

Alistair smiles unkindly.

Luka gapes. Horrified.

A HAND yanks at Luka's coat, tugging her, checking that she's still alive.

Luka looks up.

Bloody, battered, Beatrice returns the gaze, jaw locked in pain and face carved from grim stone.

BEATRICE

Get up. You aren't allowed to die here.

She pulls Luka's arm across her shoulders.

LUKA

My cane.

She motions towards it. Beatrice reaches over, nicks it, hands it back to Luka.

From above comes an awful, crackling GROAN -

- as a section of BURNING ROOF falls onto the floor between Luka and Beatrice, Vathys and Alistair.

BEATRICE

Blast!

Vathys' smoke form dissipates; she's flesh and bone once more. Exhausted, she collapses onto the ground, practically unconscious.

Beatrice pulls away from the burning wreckage, awkwardly dragging herself and Luka to the door, to safety. The fire devours the warehouse.

The crowfolk tilts their head at Vathys. Harmlessly curious.

Alistair, still kneeling at her head, murmurs frantically at her ear.

Luka stares at them over her shoulder, through the flames and wreckage.

The crowfolk reaches down, claws poised above Vathys' heart.

The flames climb higher, a barrier between Luka and the scene.

And Beatrice bursts outside, pulling Luka along with her.

ACT V

EXT. BETHANY - CONTINUOUS

Caltus Warehouse blazes as bright as the sunset.

The warehouse occupants congregate outside in a scrambled crowd. A few doctors dart around, delivering messy first aid where needed. Corpse takers load up bodies, merchandise, etc. as fast as possible. Trying to take as much as possible before bolting the scene of the crime.

Distantly, slowly growing louder over time, the clanging bells of a FIRE BRIGADE edge closer and closer to the scene.

Beatrice helps Luka a few more feet, and then can carry her no further. They stagger to the ground together, breathless, exhausted. The fire and the fight have taken their tolls.

A doctor nears them, but Beatrice waves them off. She and Luka just take a moment, trying to catch their breath.

When Beatrice speaks, her speech is stilted and stuttered between gasps for air. Her voice has gone ragged from smoke inhalation and the crowfolk's assault.

BEATRICE

Not allowed to die here either, your  
Eminence.

LUKA

Is that so.

Beatrice waves out an arm towards Caltus Warehouse.

BEATRICE

I'm owed a debt. And you're next of  
kin for that little pyromaniac.

LUKA

Inaccurate.

Beatrice laughs. It dissolves quickly into a coughing fit.

BEATRICE

You brought her in. That makes her  
yours.

She looks behind her shoulder, watching her warehouse burn and burn.

A grin cuts across her face, sharp and cruel as a knife.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

But that's no longer relevant.

Luka frowns, uncomprehending. Twists around to look at the entrance of the warehouse.

Stumbling out, looking as terrible as the other women: Vathys Nathre.

Luka's eyes flit from Vathys to the warehouse door, searching for a very specific 'survivor.'

No one else exits. Vathys, after scanning the crowd and not noticing the other two women, limps down the street, away from the conflagration. Painfully fleeing the crime scene.

LUKA

Where did he go?

Beatrice struggles to her feet. Too soon. She collapses back, coughing. Luka narrows her eyes in disapproval.

LUKA (CONT'D)

You're going to injure yourself.

BEATRICE

Not so terribly as the little  
sorcerous idiot who immolated my  
warehouse.

She lurches up, trying again. Luka reaches out, pulling Beatrice back down next to her.

Beatrice rounds on her, snarling. Luka gives her a flat look.

LUKA

I will handle it.

BEATRICE

Oh, will you?!

LUKA

There are details to Plass' murder  
which she has not been forthcoming  
with. And besides: you declared her  
mine, no?

The bells of the fire brigade are so LOUD by now.

LUKA (CONT'D)  
Take care of your people, Ms. Sutter.  
I shall take care of mine.

They hold gazes.

Beatrice moves to stand once more. Slowly. More careful of her injuries.

BEATRICE  
I'll hold you to that.

Stoic against the pain, Beatrice strides away - but pauses as she remembers.

Looking back to Luka:

BEATRICE (CONT'D)  
I found Plass' widow, right before  
that thing grabbed me up.

Then off she goes, shouting a storm at her underlings.

BEATRICE (O.S.)  
You're not paid to stand, Johnson,  
grab a bag of lime and haul!

Luka closes her eyes, taking deep breaths. Grounding herself.

BEATRICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Nealer, Dev, fetch the carts! Now!  
This place will be SPOTLESS for the  
fire brigade, are we clear!?

Luka pats down her pockets. Opens her eyes when, unexpectedly, she finds something. Holds out her hand:

Three bullets.

She stares at them. Her lips purse. Jaw clenches. A decision coalesces slowly in her mind.

She closes her hand into a fist.

The fire brigade wails closer, closer.

EXT. BETHANY - STREET - CONTINUOUS

A LAMPLIGHTER, armed with ladder and hand lamp, goes about her business of lighting the street lamps.

A FIRE TRUCK roars past her in a blast of noise. She follows its trail with idle interest, then glances up to the smoke pouring into the sky from a few blocks away. Shakes her head. Not her job to deal with.

She sets her ladder against a lamppost. Plants one foot on the steps.

VATHYS (OS)

Excuse me.

The lamplighter looks over. And keeps looking.

Vathys could pass for a corpse reanimated. The bandages around her hands are filthy. Her arm is still bleeding, though not as grievously as it ought to be, and the other is wrapped tight around her ribs. Her face, pale and sweaty from exertion, is covered in soot.

The lamplighter takes this all in with the incredible aplomb of one too shocked to do otherwise.

VATHYS

Could you give me directions to the Whale Jaw Inn? I think it's... somewhere around here.

LAMPLIGHTER

Five streets up, take a right and it's third on the left.

Vathys smiles, aiming to reassure. It's an ugly attempt.

VATHYS

Thank you kindly.

She limps by the lamplighter, who gives her a broad berth.

Vathys' progress is slow, halting. Her injuries

A HACKING cough starts up. Vathys staggers against a building's wall, leaning on one arm as the fit rattles through her. Worst of then all so far. Smoke inhalation has done her no favors.

VATHYS (CONT'D)

I need a moment. Just a second to catch my breath.

Slowly, she sinks down the wall to sit limply on the ground. She's just inside the lip of a

## SIDE STREET

Noise further down catches her attention. Another PUPPET SHOW, near identical to the one from before, is underway. Smaller AUDIENCE, though. The stage is lit by a few greasy gas lamps and the moon above.

Currently, the performance is cycling through the battle between METAL SOLDIERS and PUPPET PEOPLE. Cogs fly into the air as the soldiers are defeated. The AUDIENCE is absolutely delighted.

Outside, coming down the

## STREET

is the steady TAP - TAP - TAP of a cane on cobblestones.

Vathys doesn't look to Luka as she approaches. Just watches the puppets.

VATHYS (CONT'D)

Evening, General. Not my most delicate work, I'll admit, but I'm fairly sure no one died...

Luka pulls out her gun. Aims dead at Vathys' head.

VATHYS (CONT'D)

... yet.

She's looking now. Keeps herself stock-still. Fawn hiding from a wolf.

Luka does not question. She demands.

LUKA

Where is he.

VATHYS

(rambling in fear)

Well, after they took the book from me - sorry about that, by the way - they did their avian transformation parlor trick and flew off to nest. Though I don't know if nest is the right word when one is a crow 'folk' -

The sharp COCK of the hammer cuts her off. Luka was out of patience.

LUKA  
Don't play a fool.

VATHYS  
Oh, I'm not playing.

Bad move.

LUKA  
ALISTAIR SOULTHIEF. You made of  
yourself smoke and shadow and he was  
THERE. AT YOUR HEAD.

She steps forward, gun unwavering. Vathys flinches, presses against the wall, trying to burrow through it to safety, but there's no where to go. Nothing she can do.

The puppet show has gone utterly silent.

LUKA (CONT'D)  
WHERE. IS. HE?!

She stops just feet away from Vathys.

Vathys, graven pale, breath shuddering, eyes trained on the muzzle.

Quietly, from the mouth of the side street:

ALISTAIR (O.S.)  
Here.

Luka doesn't even THINK. Twists, aims, FIRES!

The bullet sails harmlessly through his forehead. As though he were made of nothing but mist.

From the audience of the puppet show come GASPS and SHOUTS OF ALARM at the gunshot.

Alistair stands perfectly at ease, hands folded politely in front of him, studying her with all the thoughtless curiosity of a boy thinking how best to pull the wings off an insect.

ALISTAIR  
Good evening, General Forring.

Luka cocks the hammer again.

Alistair clicks his tongue in chastisement.



ALISTAIR (CONT'D)  
You're making a scene.

He's right. The puppet show audience murmurs and stares at them, nervous and uncomprehending of the scene. A girl slumped against the wall. General Forring, bloody and wild-eyed, brandishing a gun at -

- nothing. Empty air. There is no Alistair to them.

ALISTAIR (CONT'D)  
Remarkable.

Luka looks from them to him, her own confusion growing.

ALISTAIR (CONT'D)  
They can't see me at all.

She grits her teeth at that, as confusion burns away into frustration.

Luka lowers her hand, stiffly pointing the gun at the ground instead of the Soulthief. Vathys eyes it warily.

LUKA  
(to the audience)  
Resurrectionist activity on the area.  
It ought be safe now, but return to  
your homes regardless.

A pause. The audience is still caught, frozen in decision.

From the puppet stage pops a PUPPET-ALISTAIR. Tilted leeringly at Luka.

PUPPET-ALISTAIR  
That's what you think, tin can. AH HA  
HA!

The puppet reels back, cackling diabolically - til a PUPPET-LUKA rises up and BASHES IN HIS HEAD! Puppet-Alistair shouts in pain, the audience laughs. The tension instantly dissipates.

Alistair quirks his mouth.

ALISTAIR  
That's... accurate.

The crowd steadily departs at the PERFORMERS hastily end their show.

Luka steps closer to him, pitching her voice low and intense. Trying to avoid drawing more attention from the other people.

LUKA

How.

ALISTAIR

No hello?

LUKA

I caved in your skull!

He nods agreeably.

ALISTAIR

It was very painful.

VATHYS

And disgusting.

Luka rounds on her. Vathys doesn't return the glare, eyes locked on the gun in Luka's hand. She stretches out the arm injured by the crowfolk.

VATHYS (CONT'D)

He is dead, if that's your worry. This is just his ghost.

LUKA

You have not yet answered my question.  
How.

Vathys purses her lips. Looks down at the ground.

VATHYS

'Cause someone wanted to be more than  
a ghost.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. THE LAZARIUM - LABORATORY - NIGHT

Luka and Alistair are locked in their final, fatal FIGHT.

ALISTAIR (V.O.)

I am not so arrogant, General Forring,  
as to believe I had any chance to  
survive our encounter.

He dodges - ducks - buying himself time, buying space, but the outcome of this fight is clear as day. Luka's a

juggernaut.

ALISTAIR (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 From the moment you breached my  
 citadel's walls, I knew the fate  
 before me. Nothing could change it.

From a far corner of the room, we observe the fight,  
 partially obscured by dark obstructions.

We turn around from the fight, to look in the corner and see:

Huddled in a corner, hidden by equipment and void-black  
 shadows, one hand stuffed in her mouth to muffle any noises -

ALISTAIR (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 Not even the aid of my apprentice.

Vathys Nathre watches the fight with unblinking terror.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. BETHANY - SIDE STREET - DUSK

The Luka of today stands as though carved from granite. She  
 looks down upon Vathys, terrible as a god.

LUKA  
 How long?

Vathys frowns. What an odd question.

VATHYS  
 Same as any apprenticeship. Started  
 when I was... seven, I believe? Maybe  
 eight.

Luka's expression changes minutely. A crack in the stone.

Alistair resumes.

BEGIN FLASHBACK.

INT. THE LAZARIUM - LABORATORY - NIGHT

On and on Alistair and Luka fight.

ALISTAIR (V.O.)  
 To die was certain, but death? That  
 miserable end? Not so much.

The runes on his spear glow a faint, ghostly blue. He grips it in white knuckles.

ALISTAIR (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Entombing souls is simple; you saw my soldiers. My spear would serve as phylactery. From there, Vathys and I could transfer me to a more suitable vessel.

Luka swings at his head. Alistair ducks - rolls -

- sees a chance, and LURCHES FORWARD -

CRUNCH!

Luka SHRIEKS. He's stabbed her leg!

ALISTAIR (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
But something went wrong.

Alistair wrenches back, scrabbling, but Luka's faster.

The mace CRACKS against the staff, breaking it in two. The blade goes skittering into the dark, coming to a stop in front of Vathys.

ALISTAIR (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
My soul fled not to my spear, but...

She reaches down for it. Fingers curl around the blade -

- as Luka raises her mace high with a roar, and sends it CRASHING DOWN UPON -

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. BETHANY - SIDE STREET - DUSK

The crowd has utterly dispersed by now. The puppet stage is gone. Caltus Warehouse smolders in the distance.

The world is silent and still around them.

Luka inhales heavily. Exhales slowly.

Levels the gun at Vathys' head.

LUKA  
I presume your blood disease is a fiction.

Vathys stares at the gun in pure exhaustion. A convict who's stood in the gallows noose for too long. She sighs. Here comes the lethal drop.

VATHYS

Symptom of possession. Hosting his ghost is killing me.

The gun does not waver.

LUKA

And thus it was not medical intervention you sought from Doctor Plass.

ALISTAIR

While he surely was a perfectly capable physician, what we desired was his phantasmagorical expertise.

Luka levels him a look.

VATHYS

He moonlighted as a spirit medium. Thought he might know how to exorcise a parasitic ghost.

ALISTAIR

(a teacher correcting a student)  
Poltergeist.

Luka cocks her head at him. Notices how his nonchalance is nothing but a farce now. His shoulders are drawn in tight. His hands are intertwined and white-knuckled.

Methodically, she cocks the hammer.

LUKA

A task beyond the Soulthief's apprentice?

Vathys laughs. Tries to laugh. The noise is so, so ugly.

VATHYS

Evidently!

The gun does not waver. Luka stares Alistair down.

She grips her cane in white knuckles.

Vathys leans her head back against the wall. Bares her teeth

in a grin at the gun.

And Luka...

Lowers it.

LUKA

Mysteries yet remain which require  
your input to solve. Detective Morrick  
will want to finish his interrogation  
of you.

She stores the gun in a pocket. Alistair relaxes.

LUKA (CONT'D)

But that is the work of tomorrow.  
Today has lasted too long already.

She closes her eyes. Takes another deep, heavy breath. Looks,  
for the moment, incalculably old and tired. A mountain  
crumbling to dust

Exhales, and then she is solid stone once more.

LUKA (CONT'D)

Never lie to me again.

VATHYS

Or you'll shoot me?

Luka looks at her flatly. Then away, to the sidewalk, as she  
starts to walk away. The TAP - TAP - TAP of her cane rings  
out loud in the quiet.

VATHYS (CONT'D)

One last note before today ends.

The tapping stops. Luka does not look at Vathys.

VATHYS (CONT'D)

That book? Wasn't written by Plass.

This isn't news.

LUKA

I knew the handwriting.

She stares straight at Alistair as she speaks. He beams,  
bright and cheerful. Always nice to be recognized.

Before she can change her mind, she pivots sharply. Leaves

the side street, leaves Vathys and Alistair in the dark and gloom. Strides towards the last fading beams of distant sunlight.

TAP - TAP - TAP goes her cane, Vathys drumming her fingers in time against her knee. Alistair watches her, inscrutable in his sentinel.

ALISTAIR

You're very trusting of them.

VATHYS

Have some faith.

ALISTAIR

I only worry.

Vathys smiles brightly. Jerks her head in indication of the fading tapping of Luka's cane.

VATHYS

There's no need to. If you haven't noticed, Father, I'm very good at making friends.

Betwixt her fingers, she twirls a single, glossy crow's feather.

FADE OUT.